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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000943

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SE, EUR/RPM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2014

TAGS: PREL GR TU

SUBJECT: TURKS CAUTIOUS ABOUT PAPANDREOU'S PROPOSAL FOR  
MUTUAL DEFENSE CUTS

REF: ATHENS 227

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch, reasons 1.5, b/d.

**¶11. (C) Summary:** In response to Greek PASOK candidate Papandreu's proposal that both Greece and Turkey cut their defense budgets to allow for more spending on education and other social programs (reftel), Turkish officials at MFA and TGS voiced skeptical openness to the idea. While they acknowledged that the idea was worth considering, several themes emerged:

-- The proposal was an election tactic by Papandreu and has not been formally proposed to Turkey;

-- Even if it were proposed, Turkey has other strategic considerations besides Greece that influence its defense expenditures, including Iran, Iraq, and Syria;

--Both countries were planning to cut defense expenditures anyway.

Meanwhile, the Turkish and Greek general staffs have decided to implement five previously agreed CSBMs involving exchanging visits between the militaries. These will occur after upcoming elections in both countries. End Summary.

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Mil Budget Cuts: Maybe  
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**¶12. (C) MFA DDG for Northeastern Mediterranean Affairs Necip Eguz told Pol-Mil Counselor and PolMilOff January 22 that Papandreu's idea sounded constructive, but the proposal had not been formally proposed to the GOT and therefore was not actively being considered at this time. When unexpectedly compelled to respond publicly, FM Gul welcomed the proposal as a positive step. Eguz caveated this optimism by noting that Papandreu's suggestion should be taken in the context of his election campaign, intended to burnish his image as a progressive and attract votes from the Turkish minority in Thrace. Eguz acknowledged that mutual defense reductions had been raised periodically over the last 3-4 years and were a positive sign of rapprochement between Turkey and Greece, indicating a less threatening climate. In the meantime both sides seemed to have the political will to "deepen and enlarge" the process of rapprochement. However, Turkey had much different geopolitical concerns than Greece, which may prevent it from dramatically reducing its defense budget.**

**¶13. (C) MFA DDG for NATO Affairs Fatih Ceylan echoed Eguz's comment that, because the proposal had not been formally made, it was not being considered. He noted that Greece was planning to reduce its defense budget after 2005 anyway and acknowledged that Turkey was reducing its as well.**

**¶14. (C) TGS/J-5 Greece and Cyprus Department Chief RADM (LH) Sislioglu repeated to Pol-Mil Counselor and PolMilOff February 12 that the proposal had not been made formally. He emphasized that the GOT was not working the issue yet but believed the initiative would become more concrete if PASOK and Papandreu were to win the Greek elections, as Papandreu seemed to be "a sincere person." Nevertheless, Sislioglu noted that, while Greece's main security concern was Turkey, Turkey has more serious defense considerations to its east, namely Iran, Iraq and Syria. Relations with these countries were very "fragile" and could change from good to bad in a day, implying that Turkey could not lower its guard towards them. Sislioglu admitted candidly that, because of economic considerations, Turkey's defense budget was being reduced anyway, so Ankara could at least use such an initiative to**

leverage goodwill from Greece and the international community. He speculated that Greece was likely doing the same. Sislioglu then explained that only cuts in Greece's navy and air force would be meaningful to Turkey, as Greece's army is not considered a large threat in a potential conflict between the two countries. In addition, Turkey's navy is stretched along the Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Sea Coasts, Greece's was concentrated in the Aegean. Thus, equal percentage reductions in Greece's and Turkey's navy would have consequences beyond the Aegean.

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Other CSBMs: Definitely  
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15. (C) Sislioglu said that both Greece and Turkey are now focused on implementing the CSBMs to which they had agreed in the past. There were 11 on paper, but TGS had only recently drafted action plans for five of these for both sides' consideration. Senior MFA officials for both sides agreed that the militaries could move forward on these during their "secret" consultations in London earlier this month. The Greek military had agreed to the TGS proposals the week of February 2.

16. (C) Once the level of confidence had been increased, Sislioglu hoped that more progress would be made in the talks on the Aegean and airspace. He added that if the ruling parties in both countries were to win in their respective forthcoming elections, they would have more authority and flexibility to "take dramatic steps." The five that both sides had agreed to implement involved exchanging visits between militaries. None of these visits were scheduled before April (i.e., not before Greek or Turkish elections). He did not expect anything dramatic before the Greek national and Turkish local elections.

17. (C) Comment: The Turks are clearly waiting for the outcome of the Greek elections before taking Papandreu's initiative seriously. Even then, they seem well armed to counter that Turkey's complicated strategic situation makes such cuts difficult. But budget cuts appear inevitable for the Turkish military, as GOT economic (and IMF) officials tell us that the ten-percent cut in discretionary spending that Turkey is making because of budget constraints will include military spending. In the meantime, all of our Turkish interlocutors seemed positive about the future of Greek-Turkish relations.  
EDELMAN